



an Earthdawn Legend by Chris McCubbin

It so happened one day that Kier-e-Keth came upon a village where all the T'Skrang were starving, and he went up to the headman (Jik! Don't do that to your sister, you'll make her cry) he went up to the headman and asked what was wrong. "All the fish have gone away to another part of the river," the headman said, "and we can't find them. Each night we set our traps and bait our hooks, and each day we take to our boats and spread our nets, but never are there any fish in the morning or at the end of the day. No, not even a tiny minnow or crayfish. Now all our stores are gone, and we are starving. And not even all your cleverness, Kier-e-Keth, can save us."

Of course, this offended Kier-e-Keth mightily, and (Stop it this instant, Jik, or there'll be no story at all tonight! I mean it!) and he said, "Headman, your hunger makes you say stupid things. Cleverness such as mine is enough to feed a hundred silly little villages like this one, and I will prove it to you Ð I will catch a fish for your supper. But not just any fish. I will catch the greatest fish of them all Ð old Papa Fish himself." Then Kier-e-Keth stood glaring at the headman, waiting for the headman to call him a braggart and liar. But the headman was too hungry to argue, and only stared back at Kier-e-Keth. Soon, Kier-e-Keth grew tired of staring, and got himself to the bank of the river, where . . .

(Alright, Jik. I told you. There will be no more story tonight, and you have no one to blame for it but yourself.)

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(Very well Jik. I accept your apology, and I will finish the story. But now you really must be quiet.)

At the river bank, Kier-e-Keth found a broad flat stone, big enough to dance on. And dance on it he did, children. Never, since the river began to flow, has any T'Skrang danced like Kier-e-Keth danced that day! He twirled and bowed, he leapt and he hopped, but mostly children he stamped his feet. Stamped his feet, yes, and pounded his tail as well! Chak! chak! went the feet of Kier-e-Keth, like the sound of a hundred oars all slapping the water at once. Vom! vom! went the tail of Kier-e-Keth, like the sound of a hundred boats all released at once from dry-dock. And Kier-e-Keth danced, and stamped and pounded until all the river, from the mountains to the sea, rang with the noise of the dance of Kier-e-Keth!

And out of the water rose old Papa Fish, his scales all caked with old weeds and green slime. And so big was old Papa Fish that he filled the whole river, from bank to bank. And Papa Fish opened his great mouth, which could swallow in one gulp this whole covenant and all its boats, and five more like it as well. And Papa Fish said, in his great, deep voice, "Kier-e-Keth, SHUT UP!"

"All I wanted, Kier-e-Keth, was a nice quiet nap for a century or five, and now you, with your unseemly dancing and stamping and pounding have not only wakened me, but given me a headache as well!" And Papa Fish would have said more, but just then Kier-e-Keth grabbed the largest boat hook in the village, and what do you think he did, but thrust it right through the jaw of old Papa Fish, just as though great Papa Fish were nothing more than a salmon caught in the traps!

Oh, Children! How Papa Fish fought and struggled! He reared up and smashed Kier-e-Keth against the great mountains. He dove down and tried to drown Kier-e-Keth in the deep mud. He shook Kier-e-Keth back and forth until the river boiled from the heat of their battle. But Kier-e-Keth never let go of that boat hook, for he knew that as long as he held on, Papa Fish could not swim away to the secret places of the river.



And at last Papa Fish lay gasping and still on his belly, too tired to fight any more. Kier-e-Keth was tired too - more tired than any T'Skrang has ever been - but he had promised the village a fish dinner, so he climbed to his feet and turned Papa Fish over, and drew his fishing knife to gut and bone Papa Fish.

But Papa Fish spoke, saying, "Wait, Kier-e-Keth. Don't cut me open! Let me bargain for my life." Now Kier-e-Keth never could resist an offer to bargain, so he stopped and said, "All right, Papa Fish. Let's hear your offer."

"Spare me, clever Kier-e-Keth, and I will give you some of my immortality. Only a tiny bit of it, mind you, a mere sliver - just enough to last you until the end of the world - but that should be all you'll ever need."

"That's a generous offer," Kier-e-Keth had to admit, "but what about these T'Skrang here? They're starving, and I caught you to be their supper."

"Oh, is that all that's bothering you?" said Papa Fish, and with a mighty sweep of his tail, pushed all the bounty of the river into that village. There were great rafts of roe, and all kinds of succulent river plants. And the fish! Ah, children, never have you seen such fish - salmon and trout, perch and cat. Clams and crayfish and freshwater lobster (yes Kigi, and sweet bubblefruit too - great clusters off it, bigger than the biggest T'Skrang in the village). The T'Skrang of the village feasted for five days and nights, and salted away enough more for five times five hard winters.

"There, Kier-e-Keth," said Papa Fish. "Your villagers are fed. And now the fish will return to their village - they only stayed away because they were afraid to disturb me in my nap. Now let me go, and I will give you a sliver of my immortality."

So Kier-e-Keth at last took the boat hook out of Papa Fish's jaw, and let him go. And Papa Fish swam off, vowing never again to sleep so close to a T'Skrang village. And as for Kier-e-Keth, he got his promised reward. He never grew old and he never died, and he lives today still. And that, children, is why you must always be kind and civil to strange T'Skrang - because you never know when a stranger might turn out to be clever old Kier-e-Keth. And you certainly wouldn't want him for an enemy!

- Excerpt from Robel Yronbotthem's "Commentary on 'The Battle of Kyaryket and the Oldest Fish.'"

This tale is interesting to scholars mostly in that it brings together two of the most significant figures in the mythic culture of the Serpent River - Kyaryket, or Kier-e-Keth, the T'Skrang trickster-hero, and the Oldest Fish (or the Great Fish, Papa Fish, Mudfather) the spiritual essence of the river.

There is much that is mysterious about Kyaryket, not the least of which is his name, which is neither T'Skrang nor any other known language. Somex has suggested that the name is a corruption of the old Elvish Y'kenre Y'ketstche, an archaic and poetic term for "gull," which literally means "he who laughs at those on shore" - which certainly matches the trickster-hero's attitudes.

The tale is evidently quite ancient, predating the modern crew covenant society of the T'Skrang and echoing a time when a more primitive village society prevailed. Kyaryket is, after a fashion, a historical figure. Or rather, he is several historical figures. It seems that from ancient times, T'Skrang leaders in times of crisis have taken the name of their racial hero. Early Theran chronicles speak of negotiations with a T'Skrang chieftain called "Kar-y-Katah" during the very first explorations of Barsaive. 750 years later, at the onset of the Scourge, several Kaers along the Serpent recorded that bands of T'Skrang riverfolk were led to safety within their walls by a T'Skrang calling himself Kyaryket. In each known case, this leader did not himself remain within the kaer, but returned to the wild to seek out more T'Skrang in need of sanctuary.

There are numerous parallels between the Kyaryket myth and the so-called "living legend" cults of today, although Kyaryket appears never to have actually crossed the line into veneration by the T'Skrang. Most cultural heroes are regarded as, in some sense, immortal. Common folk of all races and nations believe that someday the great hero will return to rule the faithful and punish the enemies of their people. In the myths of Kyaryket, this theme of immortality is notably explicit, and it is not only superstitious riverfolk who believe that the original Kyaryket was an adept who somehow slipped free of the bonds of death, and perhaps survives agelessly to the present. Most notable among these believers is Akeshor, who transcribed an enigmatic interview with an itinerant T'Skrang whom the scholar seemed to sincerely believe was the deathless trickster. While wholesale acceptance of such extravagant theories is surely premature, the objective researcher is, at the same time, constrained to acknowledge the possibility.

There is also much that is mysterious and enigmatic about the character of "The Oldest Fish," but there can be no doubt as to its essential reality - indeed, hyper-reality. "The Oldest Fish" is none other than the popular name for IXOMNIPAS, Master of the River, a totemistic entity long known to mages, and frequently invoked in castings and enchantments having to do with the river, navigation and fresh-water creatures. Indeed, the character of IXOMNIPAS in this tale is remarkably consistent with his reported thaumaturgic nature. The entity is regarded as immensely potent, but distant from mortals, and very difficult to subdue or even invoke on any but the most elementary levels.



Furthermore, there have been several reported manifestations of IXOMNIPAS in a form very like the leviathan described in the story. And although natural Powers of this sort are not normally regarded as loquacious, or even sentient in the mortal definition of the word, IXOMNIPAS is frequently described as "wise," and several adepts - notably the mystic Bremis - are reported to have actually had discourse with the entity. For these reasons, "The Fight Between Kyaryket and the Oldest Fish" has been regarded by many as a metaphorical trivialization of a great mage's struggle to invoke and bind a powerful spirit, to the betterment of his community and the enhancement of his own powers. This interpretation is persuasive, and

it might well be that this apparently-fanciful tale records a major and concrete event in the history of the T'Skrang people.

Gaming Notes

Any time the campaign involves a major threat to the T'Skrang communities of the Serpent River, a "Kier-e-Keth" is likely to emerge to counter it. Traditionally, Kier-e-Keth emphasizes mystical power over physical, and cunning over all. Any T'Skrang leader taking the name of the racial hero will be very likely to embody these traditional qualities. Indeed, if a T'Skrang PC demonstrates exceptional wit and charisma during a racial emergency, he might well find himself called upon to become his generation's Kier-e-Keth.

The GM might also introduce to the campaign the original, immortal Kier-e-Keth, in the form of a lone T'Skrang with an exceptionally enigmatic manner. Kier-e-Keth might wish to recruit the party's aid in some important quest on behalf of the T'Skrang people. On the other hand, he's above all a trickster, and he might just be looking for a night's amusement at the expense of the silly mortals. The trickster is not easily offended, and usually rewards his innocent victims for their trouble, after he's had his fun. However, exceptionally rude or violent reactions to his jests will not be tolerated or forgotten, and as the storyteller says, "you wouldn't want him for an enemy!"



Papa Fish, as the story suggests, is an ancient, powerful and solitary spirit, not to be

... as the story suggests, is an intense, powerful and scary spirit, not to be idly invoked or disturbed. A physical manifestation of the river spirit should be a memorable and terrifying event for the PCs.

Under the name of IXOMNIPAS, the Rivermaster, Papa Fish's power can be tapped for common spells and enchantments. This use of his power is trivial, and will not offend the spirit, or even draw its attention. Infinitely more powerful invocations of Papa Fish are possible, but they would require greater and more secret names than IXOMNIPAS, and would be very likely to draw the attention, or even the wrath, of the spirit itself.

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